

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL DAVID W. SUTHERLAND,
COMMANDER, 3RD "GREYWOLF" BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM, 1ST CALVARY DIVISION, VIA
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CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): And, well,
I'd just like to take this opportunity to welcome you to the Blogger's
Roundtable here this afternoon. And we appreciate you being with us. And the
floor is yours, sir.

COL. SUTHERLAND: Okay. First, good morning.

I'm Colonel David W. Sutherland and I command the 3rd "Greywolf"
Brigade Combat Team, 1st Calvary Division. We are currently stationed in
Diyala, the province of Diyala. And I'm on FOB Warhorse just outside of
Baqubah. And I'd like to thank everyone for being here today and give me the
opportunity to answer your questions. I'd like to focus on three important
issues that are influencing the current improvements that we are now seeing in
security and services in the Diyala Province.

As most of you know, concerned local citizens has become a topic of
discussion. And so that's the first topic that I'd like to discuss -- and
specifically the concerned local citizens with the Iraqi security forces and our
coalition forces.

Currently in Diyala, we have 4,000 local citizens who have decided to
reject al Qaeda and other extremist organizations as well as militia, and
they're now helping in the protection of their own neighborhood. They are also
providing actionable information on the location of weapons caches. They even
point out al Qaeda fighters, locations of house-borne IEDs, vehicle-borne IEDs,
deep buried IEDs. And this is all making a difference.

The local citizens understand now the future of Iraq can be better if
they get involved in ridding this area of the al Qaeda influence and participate
in the development of their own democracy, which they're also assisting and
defining. The groups are not authorized to conduct unilateral operations, and
their main focus is the security of their own villages, in support of the local
police and the Iraqi army.

Their involvement in their own security is critical, as I see it, since
it allows the Iraqi police to build on their capacity. Concerned local citizens
are also joining the security forces, which in some areas, are under-strength.
These individuals are providing, really, an outstanding service to their

communities and their involvement is making their villages, their towns, their - qadhas much safer.

The second issue is the reconciliation effort taking place across Diyala. Unlike Al Anbar, which is predominantly Sunni, in Diyala, we have 25 major tribes from all sects -- and Sunni, Shi'a and Kurdish. And we also have over 100 subtribes within this province. All are competing for resources and for power. Reconciliation in Diyala attempts to eliminate all the riffs in the society that al Qaeda about 18 months ago attempted to exploit.

As such, reconciliation goes on between not only tribes, but villages, within families, cross religious sex and even between the police and the army. It is not necessarily been easy, however, the provincial government has six active reconciliation initiatives within the province with more than 250 tribal leaders who have signed the provincial reconciliation agreement. This represents all but three of the major tribes, and those three major tribes that have not signed is due to proximity as they are closer to KRG and the northern portion of Diyala.

The people that are participating, they understand that the future of Iraq will depend on their willingness to put aside these differences and come together to reject the extremism and build on a united Iraq. They also are doing this because they miss their neighbors -- their neighbors that have been displaced, living in Karbala, and they see -- they realize that for thousands of years they've lived together and they're sick and tired of the violence.

As more people join the reconciliation efforts and begin to experience improvements in security and services, others who have not joined this peace effort are now beginning to seek agreements to enjoy the same benefits. Basically the tribal leaders are realizing that if they don't participate, they'll be left behind as security and services improve.

As a result of these reconciliation agreements, we've seen a drop of significant violent acts of more than 50 percent in the Diyala River Valley and a 71 percent drop in the -- (inaudible) --area. Overall, we've seen a decrease in violent acts of 56 percent since the first part of June.

Local government is now focusing its reconciliation efforts in a move to Muqdadiah area where the Iraqi security forces and my soldiers are currently conducting combat operations to clear the al Qaeda from the perceived safe haven that they thought they had in this town of approximately 80,000 people.

Lastly, there are incredible changes taking place throughout Diyala but especially in the provincial capital of Baqubah, which a few months ago was declared as the most dangerous city in Iraq. Today, five months after that declaration by CNN, this city is a much different place. Before the people were afraid to come out of their houses or to walk to the markets, gunfire was a common sound and the streets were empty after 1200. Every day the fear of being kidnapped or killed was always there. The people had not received their public distribution system of food rations since August of '06 and violence, both sectarian and terrorist, was tearing the province apart.

The influx of troops to Diyala beginning in March of this year allowed the Iraqi security forces and coalition forces to clear areas considered al Qaeda safe havens, establish a permanent presence in a series of joint patrol basis and provide humanitarian assistance to the people. Currently the public

distribution system of food, which is the Iraqi subsidized food program, is functional in all five of the qadhas in the province.

The local government and the security forces are continuously providing humanitarian assistance to the most remote areas where PDS might not have been able to reach the population on a regular basis. Local businesses are beginning to open and jobs are now becoming available. One of these businesses, a flour mill, is currently producing flour that is available throughout the province. And a total of five flour mills are now open within Baqubah. Rice is also being produced locally and is now available to the citizens and a work program to clean the city of Baqubah is under way and producing extremely significant results, and that is being run by the local leadership in the city.

The government has allocated over \$114 million from the 2006 budget and over 106 million (dollars) from the 2007 budget for reconstruction projects throughout Diyala. The significant part of this is the 2006 budget was the first budget province had been able to pass and they did it this year after we increased forces and were able to destroy al Qaeda in Baqubah. Additionally the provincial council is meeting every week to review new projects and focus on restoring an infrastructure that suffered absolutely years of neglect under Saddam's dictatorship.

From my time here in November 3rd of last year until March the provincial council was unable to get a quorum. Since then they've been able to establish a quorum regularly and every week. But even with all these improvements taking places we still have a long way to go. Al Qaeda militia organizations as well as other extremist groups remain a threat in Diyala, but they are quickly learning that we will enforce reconciliation agreements. Through kinetic operations, we'll also enforce our efforts to secure the population using the same.

The delivery of propane fuel is another prominent problem for the province and it will become a significant issue for the population during the winter months. Salary funds are sufficient only to make the monthly payments, there are no funds to pay for salaries that are owed to pensioners and government employees for the months that were missed. And there is an increased need for the central government to continue to support the provincial government in their request, specifically Ministry of Oil.

Regardless, we will not dwell on the problems. We'll continue to treat those as challenges. Although this brigade will conduct a transfer of authority in December, we still have many more kilometers to go before we drop our rucksacks.

And today, the situation in Diyala is better than it was four to six months ago, and I anticipate six months from now it'll be much better than it is today. And, quite honestly, the Iraqi people who I meet with daily share the same hopes, the same dreams and desires as we do. They want the opportunity to prosper, however, without the peace and stability, as you gentlemen know, the opportunity for that prosperity cannot and will not exist. And ultimately, it is up to the people within Diyala to define their definition of democracy.

So, thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity make that statement and set the stage and I'll now answer your questions.

MR. HOLT: Thank you very much, sir. Spencer Ackerman, you were first online, so why don't you get the start of the day.

Q Thanks so much, Colonel Sutherland.

I remember being in Baghdad in March right after the Striker Battalion went up there to Baqubah and you gave a really impressive briefing to some of the reporters in the Green Zone at that time and I thank you for your comments today.

I wanted to ask you about the concerned local citizens groups. To get your perspective on the ground, I'm wondering, first, why -- unlike in other areas -- your CLCs or the CLCs in the area don't operate independently, why they operate in support of the police and the army? If you've ever had incidents that you've observed where some of the CLCs go after one another, perhaps in some violent operations, or go after members of the Iraqi police and the army? And similarly, if the composition in your mixed province has led to any sort of mixed CLCs in terms of either sectarian character or tribal character?

COL. SUTHERLAND: Yeah, let me answer the last one first. There are mixed Concerned Local Citizens. And I will tell you that that's what it is -- it's a title for them. They take an oath, they sign a contract. We vet them very significantly and run them through the system before they are able to participate as a CLC, but in some areas it's a specific tribe, depending on the neighborhood, and it may be a Sunni-Shi'a mix.

For instance, in Muqdadiah right now up in the Balour neighborhood, which is a large neighborhood that was extremely violent, they have come together as Sunnis and Shi'a made up of the Tamimi Tribe, which is Shi'a, and the Jaburis Tribe, predominantly, which is Sunni. And it's because of the efforts of the local tribal leader up there, as well as the other individual from the Sunni side is the chairman of the Iraqi Islamic Party, Chairman Hamdi, who initiated the CLC work up there. So it is mixed. It is across different areas and different sects.

As far as the actions of the CLCs, this week I did have to detain one of the CLC leaders and 16 of his leadership within Baqubah, and I did this because they were not abiding by the rules that were laid out and they were also not abiding by the law.

In one case, we had evidence where the leader of this group had raped a young girl; that they were charging extortion money, that they had caches of weapons that were above and beyond what the Iraqi law allows, and they were detaining their own prisoners. The people of the neighborhood and the other CLCs from other neighborhoods are the ones that gave us the information. So, we will, as I said, enforce not only reconciliation agreements, but we will enforce the CLC agreements as well. There is always tension within Diyala. The suspicions that exist of each other cause tension, but these people are trying to guard their own neighborhood. And we started, when we first got here, trying to drive a wedge between the insurgents and the terrorists. And, then now wanting to participate in the security process and stand against the terrorists is them coming to participate in the security as well as the political process.

One of the CLC leaders who is Sunni said a few weeks ago, after we ate lunch together, that he had never sat down with an American. He felt that he was a resistance fighter. And after listening to us, talking to us, he had a different perspective on things. And he shared with me his thought that by his neighbors putting out IEDs, they were playing into Iran's hands, that when coalition forces left, they would not be part of the security process or the

political process because they spent their time putting out IEDs and resisting. And so that was a telling comment from one of their leaders to me and explained to me a great deal about why they are now participating. That individual was Sunni, he was a former Iraqi army officer, and he saw things a little bit differently based on discussions that had been taking place during reconciliation efforts.

Does that make sense to you, sir?

Q It does, sir. I was wondering if I could ask just one quick follow-up on that. When you talk about in the Balour neighborhood having a mixed Sunni-Shi'ite and sort of mixed tribal CLC, I was wondering if that's an exception to the rule. If you were to quantify it, how many are either tribally or sectarian-wise homogenous?

COL. SUTHERLAND: Yeah, there are -- in that specific neighborhood right now we have 200. One hundred are Shi'a, 100 are Sunni and that's the initial step. As we continue to secure Muqdadiyah, where we're doing an operation right now -

Q So I mean, you have that many fighters or you have that many CLCs in that one neighborhood?

COL. SUTHERLAND: No. We have that many CLCs. We have that many CLCs in that one particular neighborhood. We have 4,000 in the province.

Q And I'm sorry I interrupted you about the homogeneity.

COL. SUTHERLAND: Did that not answer it? I'm sorry, I must not have understood the question.

Q I must have missed your answer. I was just wondering about the homogeneity. Across the province if you were to say most of your CLCs are mixed in terms of tribal or sectarian identities, or if the example you gave was more of an exception? COL. SUTHERLAND: Yeah, it depends -- yeah, I understand. It depends on the neighborhood that they're in. And Kinon (sp), for instance, it is a predominantly Sunni area made up of seven different tribes. They have representatives from each tribe and in one of those tribes it is a mix of Sunni and Shi'a, so they also have Shi'a -- although not quite as prevalent -- as members. Quite honestly, they -- in Kinon (sp) and in a lot of places -- they are just representing their neighborhood. They don't look at it as Sunni-Shi'a quite as much as we do in certain areas.

Now, of course, up in Muqdadiyah, there's a little more tension because of the mix of the area being -- but in Muqdadiyah a lot of it is fighting amongst the tribes as well, although al Qaeda took advantage of that.

I guess the best way to explain it is it depends on the makeup of the neighborhood. The provincial director of police is trying to recruit IPs from the neighborhoods and just as the CLCs are representing their neighborhoods to do the same thing. It's the -- probably the best way is security practices that are most -- make the most sense in this area.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much.

And Jerred.

Q Yes, sir. Thank you for your time. Could you talk a little bit about the fact that al Qaeda had been infesting Baqubah, and the province as a whole? And now that we've kind of taken over, what's happened to -- where did all those terrorists run off to? And what are the plans to, kind of, deal with that?

COL. SUTHERLAND: Yeah, we have done over 250 deliberate brigade and battalion-level operations since I've been here. When we, when we were able to -- and you know our doctrine, we assess in a urban environment: we assess, we shape, and then we dominate. What we were able to do with Arrowhead Ripper in June was dominate Baqubah with the forces that we were able to bring in here.

A large number of the element that were in Baqubah stood and fight -- fought, and blended into the population. Some of them are still here as sleeper cells, but we are continuing to attack them through deliberate operations, not quite as many. Some moved to the Diyala River Valley, and to a area to the east of Baqubah called, what we call the Kanonwojahia (ph) Corridor.

And we did an operation called "Lightening Hammer" back about two months ago, where we conducted a series of offensive operations in the Diyala River Valley, both air assaults as well as ground infiltrations, and what I would best describe in a conventional sense, a "movement to contact" from the Kanonwojahia (ph) Corridor, where basically we ran into about a company-size element of al Qaeda, engaged and destroyed them -- and the same thing in the Diyala River Valley.

What that forced any of the remaining al Qaeda to do was attempt to establish some sort of safe haven in the Muqdadiah area. And so thus the reason we're doing what we call now "Greywolf Hammer Two" in the Muqdadiah (kaddah ?), where we are continuing to attack them there. We have reports of other movement by al Qaeda. The difference is now, compared to many months ago, is we're getting information from the CLSs who are pointing out these people as they move into their neighborhoods.

We're getting information from the tribes. But more importantly, the auxiliary support base, as well as the deliberate support base, that provided assistance to al Qaeda because of the reconciliation and because of the CLCs, has diminished. And so as they go into these areas where they thought they had a support presence -- from either resistance groups or insurgent groups, they now no longer have that, and so both Iraqi security forces as well as the tribes are turning against them.

You know, what we found is we don't necessarily have to destroy al Qaeda since they blend in so well to the population. But our aggressiveness allows us to continuously disrupt, so they don't continue to dominate areas or villages, and the people lose confidence in them as any sort of security provider or service provider, or anything else.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir.

And Andrew.

Q Good afternoon. Colonel Sutherland, this is Andrew Lubin from U.S. Cavalry ON Point. I appreciate you taking the time to speak with us.

Sir, yesterday it was reported that a U.S. air-ground attack killed 19 insurgents including -- which included also 15 civilians with nine children. Apparently afterwards, Prime Minister Maliki complained to General Petraeus about overly aggressive U.S. tactics. Is this typical, where we succeed and then the government of Iraq is undermining what our troops are doing in the surge? And can -- or are you getting any government of Iraq support when you finish securing the areas?

COL. SUTHERLAND: Yeah, I get a great deal of support from the governor -- significant amount of support from the governor, both publicly as well as privately. In fact, he went down to Baghdad -- and just returned last night, and came back with a signed memorandum from the prime minister authorizing an increase in police in the province of 6,000 more police, allowing us to have 21,000 police in the province because of the improved security situation. He also leads the reconciliation effort during -- and is very public about not only Coalition Force efforts, but our efforts, kinetically -- but our efforts to support the Iraqi security forces and the local (padahs ?) and (nahias ?). It's the same thing with the provincial director of police, who is very supportive of Coalition Forces and the Diyala Operations commander, General Abdul Karim.

So inside this province, we have found the formal government and formal leadership very supportive. I know the incident you're talking about that took place south of Khalis. The governor understood what had happened and he, in fact, did not address it to me at all, other than he knows the area best.

More importantly, though, inside Diyala, is the social order of things where the tribal leaders support our soldiers and our efforts. They also support the recruiting of the IPs and the IAs. They want their men to join the security forces. But they support Coalition Forces extreme -- in fact, they don't want us to leave. They don't want my brigade to leave, and they find us -- they show us a great deal of respect.

Q Well, sir, does that mean that the government Iraq doesn't? I mean you --

COL. SUTHERLAND: I don't deal with the government of Iraq. I'm in the province. I know that there are issues, as far as support from the central government coordinated to support the provincial government. But as far as the central government supporting Coalition Forces in Diyala, I have met with the prime minister, he was extremely complimentary when he came to visit Diyala, the deputy prime minister was as well.

They have never -- I cannot give you any anecdotal information that I have dealt with firsthand in this province, but I don't go to Baghdad very often. In fact, I try to avoid it.

Q Okay, thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: And Steve Shipper (sp)

Q Good afternoon, Colonel. Steve Schippert with ThreatsWatch.org.

I have a question regarding the Shi'a in Diyala. There's a lot of good reporting of what's going on regarding the Sunni population splitting and

opposing al Qaeda in Iraq. I ask this because I've seen an interesting article in the New York Times today regarding -- in a Baghdad neighborhood, a split between some of the Shi'a population and their support for the Mahdi Army. As a matter of fact, the journalist said in the article that now they're resented as a band of street thugs without ideology. My question, with that in mind, is, to what extent, within Diyala Province -- considering it's a very mixed province, to what extent do we run into armed Shi'a groups? And is there a similar sentiment throughout Diyala Province, as is being reported now in Baghdad, where the Shi'a population is essentially turning against, or withdrawing their support for JAM -- Jaish al-Mahdi, the Mahdi Army? Are there, are there any -- is there any Mahdi Army presence in Diyala? Is there any Badr Brigade presence in Diyala?

COL. SUTHERLAND: Yeah, there is -- well, you know the history of Badr probably as well as I do. So there is -- it's a -- it's an extremely complex question in Diyala. First, let me answer it with a simple way of putting it.

The Shi'a tribes who I just met with the paramount tribal leaders of the Tamimi tribe, which is the largest Shi'a tribe inside Diyala, have outright stated they will not support militia inside the province. The issue is the -- and it's going throughout the entire province, not just with Tamimi, but Shamori (ph) and several other Shi'a tribes.

They do not support militia, specifically Jaish al-Mahdi. In fact, they don't even like the name.

To substantiate that a little bit further, they want concerned local citizens also -- and, in fact, some of the neighborhoods have had home guards for a period of time. What happens, though, is those home guards, because they've -- their neighborhoods, for instance, I'll give you an example of (Karnavot ?) which is a neighborhood down the street from us, which got hit with a suicide bomber that killed 23 of their children about a year and a half ago. They started guarding their own neighborhood, therefore, the title was placed on them by the Sunnis as Jaish al-Mahdi because they were guarding their neighborhood.

They do not support Muqtada al-Sadr. In fact, they are very supportive of Sistani. So it -- you have to look at each case differently. In Diyala, it's not just addition and subtraction when you look at the different groups, it's geometry, physics and algebra all thrown together. They do not -- the majority of the people, the Shi'a I talk to do not support rogue militia being Jaish al-Mahdi, special JAM, they do not support their efforts. What they do support is protecting their neighborhoods.

And in fact, I went into one Shi'a town the other day. They said they wanted "1920s," which was a title put on the CLCs a few months ago by the Western Press. They wanted "1920s" because they didn't want to be associated with Jaish al-Mahdi, so they actually took the title of a Sunni rejectionist group and applied it to their neighborhood so we'd actually support them. We worked through that issue.

But I hope I'm making sense. I do not have a significant problem with Jaish al-Mahdi. I do have rogue militia, and I do have tribe-on-tribe violence that is sometimes put in the category of Jaish al-Mahdi or Ansar al-Sunna. But it is a great deal of it is sometimes just tribe-on-tribe, sometimes it's family against family, and sometimes it is just protection of neighborhood.

But there is no doubt that the (road ?) network that runs from Iran to Baghdad is used to move Iranian weapons, or smuggle. We have affected that significantly since we've been here, and thus the discovery of the large cache EFPs a few months ago in (Jadidah ?). That had the capability of making 154 EFPs out of it. So there is a support element, that they are not quite as overt as you might think.

Q All right. Understood. Thank you, sir.

COL. SUTHERLAND: We've also -- yeah, we've also detained a few leaders in the Iraqi police because they were conducting sectarian attacks, a total of four leaders inside the Iraqi police, when we first got here they were infiltrated because they weren't recruiting from their neighborhoods, they were actually doing recruiting for the police in Diyala back in October of last year from Baghdad. And that gave a bigger perception of Jaish al-Mahdi infiltration. We ended up detaining several of the leaders that were involved with that and they are now in Iraqi custody for a long period of time.

Q So in order to get (true ?) support for JAM (back ?), they had to import from Baghdad?

COL. SUTHERLAND: Yes, sir. They actually, within the police, were doing that. There have been some significant changes in the Iraqi security force leadership, but it is easy to put titles, because of suspicion, on different groups. For instance, it's easy to say someone is Jaish al-Mahdi just because they're a Shi'a and they are supporting those interests or the interests of their neighborhood.

In fact, the provincial director of police, General Ganhm (sp) has been called JAM. He's also been called al Qaeda because his hiring practice right now, because of the population of Diyala, he wants to again hire from the neighborhoods. His hiring practice is 2 to 1, Sunni over Shi'a. So the Shi'a call him al Qaeda (laughs). So we have to deal with that also. It's just perceptions and perception management.

Q Excellent. Thank you, sir.

COL. SUTHERLAND: If that makes --

MR. HOLT: Thank you very much.

Colonel David W. Sutherland with us. He's commander, 3rd Brigade Combat, 1st Cavalry Division of MND North.

We're out of time here, sir. It was a fascinating conversation. Thank you very much for joining us, and hopefully we can speak again in the near future.

COL. SUTHERLAND: Any time you'd like.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much. And once again --

(Cross talk.) COL. SUTHERLAND: And sir, I'll tell -- I'll tell you, you would be extremely proud of our American military over here. They are absolutely unflappable. And we appreciate your support and your efforts to showcase their achievements. And thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: Thank you, sir. We do what we can, and all we can. Thank you very much for being with us today, sir.

END.